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TAGS: [PHSA](#) [EWWT](#) [MARR](#) [MA](#) [CN](#) [MP](#) [SE](#)

SUBJECT: GROWING THREAT OF PIRACY IN MALAGASY AND COMORAN  
WATERS

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF DOVIE HOLLAND FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Piracy in the Indian Ocean is expanding south and east beyond the Gulf of Aden and the Somali coast, and will likely reach Malagasy or Comoran territorial waters by ¶2010. Neither country has the resources to deter or respond to this threat, nor will they be able to rely on French naval assets in the region (based out of Reunion) for assistance. Given the relatively small number of incidents in the region thus far, counter-piracy measures will continue to be most effective near Somalia, where the bulk of attacks occur. However, as increasingly successful efforts there drive activity elsewhere, Madagascar, Comoros, Mauritius and Seychelles will have to address this growing threat. END SUMMARY.

#### PIRACY EXPANDING SOUTH AND EAST FROM SOMALIA

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¶2. (C) Two recent attacks near Assumption Island (part of Seychelles' Aldabra group of outer islands) provided insight into the growth of piracy in the Indian Ocean. While the vast majority of activity remains concentrated in the Gulf of Aden and the Somali coast, increasingly effective countermeasures are driving entrepreneurial pirates further afield. Information from recent debriefs of the crew of the Indian Ocean Explorer, hijacked in March 2009, indicate that the vessel was captured by an experienced crew responsible for several high-profile hijackings in 2008 to 2009. The pirates reportedly stated their intention to expand their operating area towards Madagascar and the Maldives, and target cruise ships for their ability to bring in a high ransom.

¶3. (C) According to DOD statistics, there have been 153 incidents (including attempted boarding, vessels fired upon, and vessels hijacked) in the Indian Ocean from January to October 2009 alone, compared with only 86 in all of 2008. The territory in which pirates operate has expanded massively over the past several years, growing from roughly 165 nautical miles (nm) off the coast of Somalia in 2005 to 1,000 nm in 2009. The recent attacks in Seychelles' waters brings piracy within about 200nm of Malagasy shoreline. Furthermore, the Mozambique Channel, which separates Madagascar from mainland Africa, represents a prime target with its heavy shipping traffic. On November 5, press reports indicated that a Greek cargo ship, the Delvina, had been hijacked by suspected Somali pirates 220 nm north of Madagascar, as the ship was traveling en route to Mombasa, Kenya.

#### MADAGASCAR AND COMOROS UNABLE TO RESPOND

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¶4. (C) Madagascar and Comoros do not have the naval assets

necessary to respond to the threat of piracy. Madagascar's sole capable patrol asset is a single fishing surveillance ship; Comoros has none at all. In the event of a pirate attack, these countries would likely seek assistance from France, which has a naval presence in nearby Reunion - but the distances are too great for any kind of rapid response, and France does not maintain any deterrence in the Mozambique Channel. The governments of Mauritius and Seychelles are more cognizant of this threat, and have been seeking training and resources from regional allies, but they too will be unable to assist if trouble arises in Madagascar or Comoros.

15. (C) COMMENT: Madagascar and Comoros remain far from the action, but the threat of piracy is increasingly real, and there will likely be incidents within Madagascar's territorial waters by 2010. The threat remains too low to justify an international response at this time, but should there be an increase in attacks, these countries will be entirely unable to address the problem without help, and they have not been oblivious to the extensive media coverage of international efforts to assist the Seychelles as piracy has crept into their territorial waters. END COMMENT.

16. (SBU) This cable has been cleared by Embassy Port Louis.  
MARQUARDT